

Questioned BP President On Lack of an Effective Response Plan

May 12, 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. – While reiterating his support for responsible offshore drilling, U.S. Congressman Charlie Melancon (LA-03) called for improved safety precautions for all deepwater energy production at a Congressional hearing today on the April 20th Deepwater Horizon disaster. Congressman Melancon also questioned BP America's president about the company's lack of an effective response plan for containing a major oil spill. During his questioning, Congressman Melancon said the federal government needs to require increased safety standards for deepwater drilling to protect both workers and the environment from future catastrophes.

"I've been a pro-oil and gas person here...I've been a defender of offshore drilling" said Rep. Melancon in the hearing. "I think the record for shallow water offshore drilling speaks for itself. I think it's very good, very reliable."

"I think this accident demonstrates that maybe our government, in the form of Minerals Management, working with the industry, needs to figure out what we have to do, to do this better."

"Because I can't with a good heart encourage the continuation of deepwater [drilling] until I know that all safety precautions are there, that all back-up systems are there, that all systems will work under the conditions, whether it's depth, temperature, or whatever."

Congressman Melancon made these comments during today's hearing investigating the Deepwater Horizon disaster held by the Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

Congressman Melancon has been a strong supporter of expanding responsible offshore drilling to grow Louisiana's economy and create jobs. Primary among the pro-drilling bills he has supported in Congress was major legislation passed in 2006 to expand offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico and increase Louisiana's share of the royalties. Congressman Melancon was an original co-sponsor of the House version of the bill and worked to secure the Democratic votes needed to pass the legislation.

The Melancon-supported Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act opened 8.3 million new acres in the Gulf of Mexico to offshore oil and natural gas drilling and shared 37.5 percent of the new royalties with Louisiana and the three other oil-producing Gulf Coast states. The new revenue-sharing deal is projected to provide a dedicated revenue stream of more than \$13 billion over the next 30 years for coastal restoration projects in Louisiana.

Congressman Melancon represents in the U.S. Congress the areas of coastal Louisiana most directly affected by the oil leak, including Plaquemines, St. Bernard, Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes. The Deepwater Horizon platform was located 50 miles off the coast of Louisiana's Third Congressional District.

Congressman Melancon has been leading efforts in Louisiana to coordinate the response to the oil leak caused by the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil platform three weeks ago. Last Friday, Congressman Melancon [traveled with a bipartisan delegation](#) of Energy and Commerce Committee members visiting south Louisiana to investigate the oil leak and evaluate the response and containment efforts.

Congressman Melancon held a town hall last Friday in Chalmette to listen to constituent concerns about the oil leak disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and provide information about the response efforts. Representatives from the Coast Guard, BP, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Louisiana State University, Louisiana's seafood industry, and St. Bernard Parish officials took part in the town hall to help answer questions and listen to concerns.

Earlier that week, Congressman Melancon [received a briefing on Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes' response plans](#) to the oil rig disaster at BP's facility in Houma. He heard from Lafourche Parish President Charlotte Randolph and a representative from Terrebonne Parish who detailed their plans for boom deployment and other protective measures to prevent the oil sheen from damaging their coastal marshes.

Congressman Melancon also [toured by boat the coastal marshes](#) in St. Bernard Parish with parish officials and viewed the efforts of local fishermen to deploy boom. Over one million feet of protective boom have been deployed to protect Louisiana's fragile coastal marshes from the oil slick.

In his conversations with local fishermen and parish officials involved in laying the boom, Congressman Melancon learned they face a severe shortage in boom material, hindering their ability to protect the coast. In response, Congressman Melancon [sent a letter to President Barack](#) Obama last Friday requesting military aircraft be used to help bring protective boom to the Gulf Coast more quickly. The President granted his request and yesterday the first Air Force aircraft arrived in Belle Chasse with additional boom.

Congressman Melancon has also been working to minimize the economic impact of the oil leak on Louisiana's seafood industry. On April 29th, the Congressman contacted the Secretary of Commerce and the head of NOAA's Fisheries Service [urging them to prepare to direct disaster funding to Louisiana's commercial and recreational fishermen](#).

[In his letter](#), Congressman Melancon noted that the oil intrusion resulting from the Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster would likely damage the fragile habitats on which Louisiana's fishermen, oystermen, and shrimpers depend.

A few days later, Congressman Melancon traveled to lower Plaquemines Parish to meet with NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco to discuss how to lessen the impact of the oil leak on Louisiana's vital fishing industry.

Congressman Melancon met the following day with [commercial and recreational fishermen in St. Bernard Parish](#) involved in the oil leak containment work. While there, Congressman Melancon also [met with Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson](#), St. Bernard Parish President Craig Taffaro, St. Bernard head of the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness John Rahim, and other local, state and federal officials to evaluate current efforts to minimize damage to Louisiana's coastal marshes and fishing grounds.

###